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Sport and Society Asia Pacific Special Issue

**The Rise of Sport in the Asia-Pacific Region and a Social Scientific Journey through
Asian Pacific Sport**

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ABSTRACT

In the first quarter of the twenty-first century, the sociological, political and economic significance of sports in the Asia-Pacific region has been continually on the rise. First, the prominence of Asian athletes at international sporting arenas has become more visible. Second, major global sports mega-events are frequently hosted in Asia Pacific countries. Third, the Asian sport industry is rapidly expanding. Fourth, international labour migration is increasingly noticeable in the Asia-Pacific's sport industry. Fifth, displaying national identity is another important aspect of Asia-Pacific sport today. With this increasing significance of sport in Asian society, this Asia Pacific Sport and Social Science special issue fundamentally aims to provide a scholarly public sphere wherein sound theoretical, contextual and critical reviews of sports in the region can be circulated. While this yearly special issue welcomes contributions from international academics whose research interests are in Asia Pacific sport, we also encourage Asian scholars to submit their work to the journal. We are certainly not biased in either direction but simply want to see both insiders' view and outsiders' perspectives on sport in the Asia-Pacific sport studies.

The rise of sport in Asia-Pacific

In the first quarter of the twenty-first century, the sociological, political and economic significance of sports in the Asia-Pacific region has been continually on the rise. Arguably we can identify five distinctive trends that evidence this claim. First, the prominence of Asian athletes at international sporting arenas has become more visible. For example, at the 2016 Summer Olympics, China, Japan and South Korea won 129 medals, ranking in third, sixth and eighth places in the medal table respectively. More remarkably, these three East Asian nations have never failed to finish outside the top ten positions in the medal tally since Athens 2004. They are undoubtedly global sporting powerhouses and it is important to recognise the connection between sport and politics in this region. The Chinese, Japanese and South Korean governments have systematically fostered elite athletes and have strategically invested in high-performance sport in order to display their power symbolically through sport (Park & Lim, 2015; Yamamoto, 2012; Tan, Zheng, & Dickson, 2019; Zheng, Chen, Tan, & Lau, 2018). It is evident that the political elites in these nations consider sporting prowess as an indicator of their enhanced status in the world. Other countries in the Asia-Pacific region such as Taiwan, Singapore, Vietnam and North Korea appear to be following in the footsteps of the East Asian trio, devoting a large amount of resources to developing sport as a tool for elevating their international image (Peh, 2014; Lee & Bairner, Sport and communism: The examples of North Korea and Cuba, 2017). The politics of sport in the Asia Pacific region, especially comparative sport politics and policy, is a topic that requires close academic investigation.

Second, major global sports mega-events are frequently hosted in Asia Pacific countries. In 2010, the inaugural Youth Olympic Games was held in Singapore and in 2017 the Summer Universiade went to Taipei, capital city of Taiwan. South Korea, Japan and China have been particularly keen to stage international sporting events. For example, the fact that

PyeongChang (winter), Tokyo (summer) and Beijing (winter) won the right to host the 2018, 2020 and 2022 Olympic Games respectively is worthy of attention. This is the first time in the history of the Olympic movement that three consecutive events have been awarded to non-Western cities. This development is by no means a coincidence but reflects the three countries' increasing political and economic influence in the current world order. Indeed, these may be occasions to celebrate the arrival of the 'Asian century' (Khanna, 2019; Romei & Reed, 2019). As social scientists, our role must be to examine critically the social, political and economic implications of such events. Hosting any level of sport mega-event is closely linked to government policy in different areas from urban regeneration to soft power accumulation (Gold & Gold, 2008; Grix & Houlihan, 2014). Non-governmental organisations have protested about certain developmental projects associated with mega-events due to their high economic and environmental cost (Timms, 2012). many sporting events in this region, particularly those held in Southeast Asia, have been untouched. However, there is academic work that examines the political undertones of sport mega-events in the Asia-Pacific region (Lee, 2016; Tan & Green, 2008; Tan, Bairner & Chen, 2019; Tan & Houlihan, 2013;).

Third, the Asian sport industry is rapidly expanding. The commercial value of the Chinese Super League continues to grow, and the professional baseball markets in Japan, South Korean and Taiwan are now well established. Asian sport goods brands such as *Asics*, *Giant*, *Merida*, *Anta* and *Li-Ning* are now recognised internationally. Simultaneously, the Asia-Pacific region offers arguably the largest consumer market for the global sport industry (Rowe & Gilmour, 2010). A huge volume of Western sports media products such as the MLB, the NBA, and the English Premier League (EPL) is consumed in this area (Cho, 2008; Huang, 2013). Teams from the prestigious North American and European leagues even organise regular Asian tours in order to maintain and perhaps increase their market share. In addition, the growth of e-sport in Asia must not go unnoticed. The Neilson Report (2018) anticipated that e-sport

would be the most dynamic component of the global sport industry in the coming years. The technology-savvy East Asian nations such as China, South Korea and Taiwan actively engage in the development of e-sport business. The Asia Pacific may be the region that takes competitive gaming most seriously. The fact that e-sport appeared at the 2018 Asian Games as a demonstration event and that it will be featured as an official event at the 2019 Southeast Asian Games shows the importance of this non-conventional sport in the Asian sporting landscape. The vibrant sport market in the Asia Pacific region can be investigated from a range of different academic perspectives including critical sociology and global sport management.

Fourth, labour migration is another noticeable trend in the Asia-Pacific's sport industry. With the increasing marketability of Asian sports leagues, professional clubs have begun to attract high-profile athletes and coaches from the West (Houlihan, Tan, & Green, 2010; Takahashi & Horne, 2006). Although the most common destinations for these imported professionals tend to be northeast Asian countries where sport labour markets are well established, southeast Asian leagues also welcome foreign nationals (Akindes, 2013; Lee, 2015). It is believed that the appearance of these western 'mercenaries' can help to improve the quality of matches, thereby making Asian professional leagues more commercially viable. Intra-continental sport labour migration also occurs. For instance, Japanese coaches and Taiwanese pitchers are to be seen in the Korean Baseball League. Moreover, evangelical sport 'pioneers' from the more developed northeast often fulfil the role of the national team managers in the less developed southeast. At the same time, some Asian players find their way to European and North American leagues. MLB teams hire talented Korean, Japanese and Taiwanese players, and EPL clubs employ Korean and Japanese footballers. While the Western transfer markets can offer these Asian 'aspirants' new career opportunities with lucrative commercial deals, it should be noted that some clubs simply purchase these sporting hopefuls as lures to entice cash-rich Asian investors and consumers (Tan, & Bairner, 2011). Meanwhile,

this haemorrhaging of promising Asian athletes from their domestic leagues can lead to the problem of deskilling and dependent development. Hence, careful observation and evaluation of this specific migratory pattern are required.

Fifth, displaying national identity is an important aspect of Asia-Pacific sport today. The interrelationship of sport and nationalism can be also observed, of course, in many parts of the world. Yet, given the long history of invasion, domination and resistance that most Asian nations have experienced, sporting nationalism in the Asia-Pacific region possesses a particularly emotive character. The deep emotional scars that Japanese occupation left on China and Korea are not yet fully healed and deeply seated anti-Japanese sentiments often erupt when their national teams encounter Japanese opponents (Lee, 2015; Lu & Hong, 2014). Conversely, as witnessed at the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang, North and South Korean relations and the demonstration of a unified Korean identity represents a major national discourse which sport helps to reinforce on the Korean peninsula. In 2018, Taiwanese activists campaigned to take part in the upcoming Tokyo Olympics under the name of Taiwan, and not Chinese Taipei (Regan, 2018). Angered by this challenge to its the One-China policy, the PRC successfully put pressure on the East Asian Games Association to reverse its decision to hold the 2019 East Asian Youth Games in Taichung (Spencer, 2018). Recently, Singapore has strategically developed its elite sport programme in order to display the ‘Singapore spirit’ through sport. Within this scenario, Singaporean medal winners are often portrayed as national heroes, thereby exemplifying sport being utilised as a part of nation-building process. These are only a few of the examples of the demonstration of the characteristics of sportive nationalism in this cultural zone. Further research on sport and national identity in different corners of the Asia-Pacific can yield fruitful academic debate.

The five trends we have highlighted in this essay by no means constitute a fully comprehensive list of research agendas in the field of Asia Pacific sport studies. However, they at least provide a useful starting point for social scientific discussion on sport in this region. This *Asia Pacific Sport and Social Science* special issue fundamentally aims to provide a scholarly public sphere wherein sound theoretical, contextual and critical reviews of sports in the region can be circulated. While this yearly special issue welcomes contributions from international academics whose research interests are in Asia Pacific sport, we also encourage Asian scholars to submit their work to the journal. We are certainly not biased in either direction but simply want to see both insiders' view and outsiders' perspectives on sport in the Asia-Pacific sport studies.

We are keenly aware of the challenges that Asian scholars face in the domain of the English-language academic publishing. Here, therefore, we offer some practical guidance for drafting manuscripts and responding to reviewers' comments. First, the most frequently occurring issue that we have observed while reviewing essays on Asian sport submitted to this special issue and other publication outlets is that some manuscripts lack a sound theoretical underpinning. These articles often adopt rigorous research methods but the presentation of findings or discoveries are merely descriptive. Our experience tells us that this type of positivist empirical research lacking valid theoretical analysis is hardly acceptable for quality social science journals. In addition, some essays simply provide a historical and contextual account of sport-related issues. We accept that not every social scientific research needs to contain empirical and experimental procedures. A good critical and theoretical review of sporting phenomena can make a valuable contribution to academia. Nonetheless, we have seen a not insignificant number of articles which only report social and political issues in sport without theoretically informed interpretation. Reportage of this kind must be avoided when drafting an

academic paper. In this respect, our advice is that you make serious intellectual efforts to explore various theoretical perspectives relevant to your study and apply these throughout the research process

Second, for many Asian authors whose native language is not English writing a publishable manuscript in English is a daunting task. We have seen occasions when a paper displays good academic quality but is finally rejected largely due to the use of unclear English. This may seem unfair and native English speakers certainly enjoy a considerable linguistic advantage. Nonetheless, we must acknowledge that English is the common language of science, including sport studies, in the present century. We must also accept that disseminating our research in English is important if one wishes to engage in meaningful international scholarly communication.

For academics from non-English-speaking countries, the simplest solution is to seek advice from English editing service providers. You may write a manuscript in your first language and ask these companies to translate your initial draft into English. This may be an effective solution but can be expensive. Furthermore, you must recognise that language professionals are not necessarily experts in your research area. It is, therefore, your responsibility to check if the English terms being used in the translation are accurate and appropriate. An alternative is writing a paper jointly with a researcher (or researchers) whose native tongue is English and who have shared scholarly interests. Here, building a collaborative partnership is the key. Your research partner can revise and refine your rough English draft. This international cooperation looks advantageous but one must realise that it may increase your dependency. Another way to address the language issue is to read a large volume of research papers in English so that you can be familiar with English academic writing. The more you read, the more you acquire specific writing skills. We agree that this is a time consuming and difficult exercise but this can eventually give you greater academic independence. There

is no easy solutions. The three methods suggested here all have pros and cons. Ultimately you have to decide what is best for you depending on your resources and needs.

Third, in terms of responding to the editor's decision and of developing strategies for successful revision, you may find the following tips helpful. An author should try to receive reviewers' opinions positive and make modifications in line with their feedback. When revising your work, convince your reviewers with evidence. However, if a reviewer's comments contain unreasonable criticism or a clear misunderstanding your arguments, you should defend your position perhaps by rephrasing key arguments or finding additional supporting ideas or sources in order to persuade the reviewers. It is also important to remember the tone of your defence. Overly assertive and even argumentative responses without clear justification may frustrate reviewers and lead to rejection. Academic exchanges must be constructive. Thus, always be considered when responding. Your replies should be expressed firmly but modestly. An author also needs to be prepared to find a solution that strikes a balance. If the gap between your opinion and that of a reviewer seems unbridgeable, you may suggest some common ground and revise your paper accordingly. If two reviewers' opinions that are mutually contradictory, you may take a more strategic approach, accepting one reviewer's recommendations and thereby seeking to challenge the other. Moreover, if you feel confident that a reviewer has been negligent in providing destructive and derogatory feedback, you can report this issue to the editor. Not only might your initiative protect future contributors to the journal from an unfairly negative reviewer, but it will also help to maintain the quality of the review system.

Last but by no means least, authors should use the manuscript and referencing style of the journal correctly. This may appear a relatively minor issue but failure to do so could be taken as a sign of the author paying little attention to the publication standards of the journal. When a manuscript is finally accepted and the copy-editing is being done, the author is required to change any inaccurate styles and referencing in accordance with the journal's publishing

manual when. It is therefore sensible to use the right format from the very beginning of the manuscript preparation process.

In this special issue

In this first special issue on Asia Pacific sport and social science in *Sport in Society*, scholars based in northeast Asia, including China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, are responsible for ten articles, each of which presents original findings from their recent research. We are hopeful that this may reflect an increasingly vibrant research culture in these countries. Indeed, the tradition of social scientific research into sport is more established in the Far East than in other Asian regions. At this juncture, we hope that this special issue stimulates academic curiosity about social, political and economic implications of sport in the wider Asia-Pacific region.

The opening article in this issue examines the gender identity politics of Taiwanese belly dancers. In a cultural context in which tensions between conventional and contemporary femininity exist, Yu-chi Chang and Alan Bairner investigate how a group of belly dancers construct and negotiate their gender identities by performing this Arabic dancing practice. The next essay is concerned with the way in which an image of ideal fatherhood is created through sport in South Korea. In this study, Chanwoo Park and Sun Yong Kwon focus on a youth baseball league as a place where the meaning of being a good father is actively constructed and understood. The third paper is concerned with elite sport development policy in China. Using the advocacy coalition framework as a primary conceptual tool, Xiaoqian Richard Hu considers the rationale and ideological factors that lie behind the termination of ‘dual-registration policy’ in Chinese diving and its consequences. This is followed by an article on sport and relations between North and South Korea. Doosik Min and Yujeong Choi offer a historical review of

inter-Korean sport exchange programmes and critically evaluates the role of sport in improving relations. In the fifth essay, Kyu-soo Chung, Geumchan Hwang and Dong Soo Ryu discuss young Korean people's perceptions of sport celebrities' deviant behaviour. Given the unbridgeable lifestyle gap between sports stars and ordinary youth in South Korea, this study notes that young people feel a sense of deprivation when they see scandalous news about famous young athletes. The sixth article deals with female fitness culture in China. From the viewpoint of feminist geographical theories, Huan Xiong reveals how social space for female empowerment is being created through taking part in physical activities in different urban settings, thereby challenging conventional gender norms in China. The next essay investigates coaching practices in Japanese rowing. By focusing on the case of a university rowing club, Michael Burke and his colleagues demonstrate both autonomy and supportive behaviour. The adoption of a Foucauldian approach enhances the theoretical reading of this coaching practice in Japan. Cycling tourism on Hainan Island in China is examined in the next paper. Here, Meng Yuan and her colleagues emphasise the increasing use of bicycles in China and explain how this relatively new example of leisure tourism can contribute to the well-being of tourists. In the ninth article, Yang Zhang, Jessica W. Chin and Shirley H. M. Reekie also examines the elite sport development system in China but this time in relation to the lack of generic educational opportunities for young athletes. The experiences of professional Wushu fighters are offered as evidence. The last essay in this special issue looks at adapted physical education in Taiwan. Drawing upon an extensive survey, Chiu-ling Liu, Chin-tien Ding and Yueh-po Huang explores the attitudes of primary school teachers towards physical education programmes for pupils with disabilities.

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